



3 EMERGING MEDIA MUST-HAVES FOR EVERY SMALL BUSINESS

By Chad Richards
Firebelly Digital



Today's consumers not only want, they expect, an engaging online user experience. Below, are three easy and cost-effective solutions that no business can afford to be without.

1) A BLOG: Maintaining a blog is a simple way to break down the barrier between corporate and consumer. Blogs are not just for self-indulgent, angst-ridden teenagers to wax endlessly about the insignificance of everyday life. Nope. In fact, more and more businesses of all sizes are using blogs to communicate directly with customers and to provide collaborative space for developers.

One of the first things you need to consider is whether you want to use a hosted or stand alone platform. Popular hosted blogging platforms are Blogger, Typepad and Wordpress.com. All you have to do is sign up for their service (some are free, some have a fee), make a few tweaks to the options and design, and you'll be blogging in no time. Building a stand alone blog is more complicated because you have to take care of everything in building your blog from the ground up. But if you want a bit more control and have some server space and onsite tech support, you may want to consider Movable Type or Wordpress.org (note that Wordpress.org is different from Wordpress.com).

The second thing you must consider is the tone of your blog. You can opt for a "voice of authority" to share your expertise or you can use a more casual voice that allows readers to relate to you more personally. Either one is fine. Choose the tone you're most comfortable using and post frequently. Readers will abandon a blog that is not updated often.

An additional tool that is built into most blogging software is RSS. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and it makes it possible for readers to subscribe to the content so they no longer have to visit the blog to get it. Content comes to them via a "feed" every time you update your site.

2) MYSPACE: There are dozens of social networking sites online (LinkedIn, Facebook, and Eons to name a few), but if you're going to use just one – Myspace is a must. And before you go dismissing it as "Ah, that's just for kids," please consider the following statistic from the Forrester Research Group:

37 percent of the 57 million current users are adults that visit the site daily.



37 percent of 57 million? That is roughly 21 million adults logging in to Myspace everyday. The site also reportedly attracts new registrations at a rate of 230,000 per day! And according to Alexa Internet, an Amazon.com subsidiary that provides information on web traffic, Myspace is the third most visited website in the United States and the sixth most popular worldwide. Anyone with an email address can register and be adding friends within minutes and the ways to customize and personalize your page are almost limitless. You can upload countless photos, videos and widgets. You can even maintain a blog on your page.

One of the most useful features on Myspace is the ability to post "bulletins." Bulletins are just like email blasts that go out to everyone on your friends list. These can be used to make the public aware of new product launches, sales and special event announcements, coupons, or anything else you'd like to make the public aware of.

For a price you can also advertise your business on the home page and on banner ads throughout the site.

3) ONLINE VIDEO: Video is by far the most engaging medium; there is no better way to get through to your audience online. According to the Edgar Dale Cone of Learning:

People remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, and 50% of what they see and hear.

That's right. All the text, pictures, music and even audio podcasts are not going to make visitors to your site remember you, your product or service as much as a video would. And the video doesn't have to be an elaborate, cinematic masterpiece. Talking heads can be just as effective.

Consider a video greeting on your home page or replacing customer testimonial quotes with actual video of clients singing your praises. Not literally singing, of course – although that might make for an excellent viral video on YouTube!

You want to make sure you put your video in an appropriate format for online viewing. Microsoft's (.WMV) files, Apple Quicktime (.MOV) files and Flash Movie (.SWF) files are all easily embedded into websites. The Flash format is increasingly popular on the Web these days as most computers come with a Flash player pre-installed.

To create even more exposure (and spread the word even further) you can upload your video to sites such as Google Video and the aforementioned



YouTube. Those sites make it very easy for you and others to share and embed your video into blogs, emails, mobile devices, Myspace pages, and more.

If you'd like more information on how you can incorporate a blog, Myspace, and online video into your marketing campaign, contact Firebelly Digital at 317.557.4460 or go to www.firebellydigital.com.